

Other Sections Required by NEPA and/or CEQA

5.1 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to examine the potential of the proposed project to significantly or adversely affect the environment; potential impacts could be either direct or indirect. Indirect effects (NEPA, 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] section 1508.8[b]) may include growth-inducing effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density, or growth rate, and related effects on air, water, and other natural systems including ecosystems.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to discuss the ways in which a proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. This includes ways in which the proposed Project would remove obstacles to population growth or trigger the construction of new community services facilities that could cause significant effects (CEQA Guidelines, section 15126.2).

To address this issue, potential growth-inducing effects are examined through the following considerations:

- Removal of obstacles to growth (e.g., through the construction or extension of major infrastructure facilities that do not presently exist in the project area or through changes in existing regulations pertaining to land development);
- Expansion requirements for one or more public services to maintain desired levels of service as a result of the proposed Project or alternatives;
- Facilitation of economic effects that could result in other activities that could significantly affect the environment; and/or
- Setting a precedent that could encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment.

Growth-inducing effects are not to be construed as necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment. This issue is presented to provide additional information on ways in which the SCH Project could contribute to significant changes in the environment, beyond the direct consequences of developing the land use concept examined in the preceding sections of this EIS/EIR. The following analysis focuses on whether the SCH Project would directly or indirectly stimulate or accommodate growth in the surrounding area.

The proposed SCH Project would provide replacement habitat that would offset some of the near-term habitat losses that are expected to occur as surface water levels at the Salton Sea decline and salinity increases, which will reduce the ecological productivity of the Sea. The creation of this habitat would not

removal any obstacles to growth, result in the extension of major infrastructure facilities, or result in any changes in existing regulations pertaining to land development in the area around the Salton Sea.

The SCH ponds would be located in an area that is within the current boundary of the Sea, but which will become exposed playa as the shoreline recedes. The installation of the SCH ponds at this location would preclude the reclamation of this area for other uses, which could include agricultural uses.

Implementation of the SCH Project would not result in any significant impacts on public services (e.g., police fire, or trauma centers) and thus no expansion of public services would be required to maintain desired levels of service as a result of the Project. The creation of replacement habitat by the SCH Project would not set a precedent that could encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment.

The construction of the SCH Project would result in short-term increases in local employment, which would cease at the end of construction. Operation of the project would increase local employment by two persons, which would have a negligible effect on the local economy. The operation of the SCH ponds would increase opportunities for passive recreation (e.g., bird watching), but the ponds are not specifically designed to encourage or facilitate such activities, and increases in passive recreation use at the SCH ponds may offset existing recreational uses at other locations that could decline as the Salton Sea recedes. Thus, the Project would not facilitate any economic effects that would result in other activities that could significantly affect the environment.

In summary, the SCH Project would not foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the area around the Salton Sea in Imperial and Riverside counties.

5.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHORT-TERM USES AND LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

NEPA requires than an EIS define the balance or trade-off between short-term uses and long-term productivity in relation to the proposed activity (40 CFR section 1502.16).

The SCH Project involves tradeoffs between long-term productivity and short-term uses of the environment. Construction activities would result in a number of short-term impacts that would cease upon completion of construction activities. These include air quality impacts from increased emissions of criteria pollutants; biological impacts from loss of habitat and special-status species, disturbance or loss of riparian or other sensitive habitats, and adverse effects on Waters of the United States; cultural and paleontological resource impacts associated with potential for exposure of and damage to such resources from ground-disturbing activities; hazard impacts associated with the release of air and dust-borne disease causing viruses during ground-disturbing activities; and environmental justice impacts from construction emissions that would have a disproportionate impact on minority and low-income populations. All of these short-term impacts would be mitigated to a level of less than significant with the exception of construction-related impacts on air quality and the associated environmental justice impacts associated with the construction emissions.

The SCH Project proposes the long-term use of land along the current shoreline of the Salton Sea to provide replacement habitat that will be lost as salinity increases and the Salton Sea recedes as a result of reduced inflows. Initially, the SCH ponds would be operated as a “proof-of-concept” project until approximately 2025, with a potential range of operational parameters (related to salinity and water residence times) to determine the optimal habitat conditions that maximize the habitat values of the ponds. After that period, the SCH ponds would be operated to maximize the habitat values of the ponds,

1 which would partially offset the loss of habitat that results from the decline in the surface level and
2 increase in salinity of the Salton Sea. Thus, the long-term productivity of the land area occupied by the
3 SCH Project would relate to ecological productivity of the replacement habitat, which would include the
4 fish raised in the ponds and the piscivorous (fish-eating) birds that used the ponds as a source of food.

5 5.3 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES

6 Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR address any significant irreversible
7 environmental changes that would be involved should the project be implemented, when the project also
8 is subject to NEPA. Resources that are committed irreversibly or irretrievably are those that cannot be
9 recovered if the project is implemented. The SCH Project would involve the irreversible and irretrievable
10 commitment of two types of resources: (1) general industrial resources including energy and fuels, and
11 construction materials; and (2) project-specific resources such as water resources and land uses at the
12 affected sites.

13 Fossil fuels and energy would be consumed during construction and operation activities. Fossil fuels
14 (diesel oil and gasoline) would be used for construction equipment and vehicles. Electricity would be
15 used to operate pumps that deliver water to the ponds or circulate water between ponds. Use of these
16 energy resources would be irretrievable and irreversible. As discussed in Section 3.6, Energy
17 Consumption, these resources are locally and regionally available and their use would not result any
18 adverse effects on the availability of these resources.

19 Construction materials such as rock riprap and gravel would be required for the Project and would also be
20 irretrievably committed. As discussed in Section 3.8, Geology and Soils, these materials are regionally
21 available and their use during construction would not result in any adverse effects on the availability of
22 these resources.

23 Construction and operation of the SCH project would involve the commitment of water resources, which
24 would be irretrievable and irreversible. Water would be used during construction for dust control, and
25 during operations water would be diverted from the New or Alamo rivers to the SCH ponds and then
26 would be discharged to the Salton Sea. As discussed in Section 3.11, Hydrology and Water Quality, the
27 temporary impoundment of water in the SCH ponds would result in evaporation within the ponds, and
28 over time this evaporation would contribute to a decline in the surface level in the Sea. Water resources
29 are locally available, although regional availability of water resources is limited. The use of water
30 resources by the SCH Project to provide replacement habitat could locally limit the availability of water
31 resources for other uses.

32 The land area that would be used by the SCH Project includes undeveloped lands along the current
33 shoreline of the Salton Sea, including lands that are currently inundated by the Sea, and could include
34 lands currently used for agriculture (if the selected alternative includes a gravity diversion from the New
35 and/or Alamo rivers). The land area currently within the existing footprint of the Salton Sea provides
36 habitat for fish and birds and with implementation of the SCH Project, this area would continue to
37 provide similar habitat. However, as the Salton Sea recedes, without the SCH Project this area would
38 become exposed playa, which could be used for other purposes, including agricultural uses. The use of
39 this land to provide habitat for the SCH Project would be irretrievable and irreversible for the duration of
40 the Project (approximately 75 years). The amount of exposed playa that would be occupied by the SCH
41 ponds would be approximately 4 to 8 percent (depending on the alternative selected) of the total amount
42 of exposed playa that would occur as the Salton Sea recedes, and thus the utilization of exposed playa for
43 the SCH Project would not result in an adverse effect on the availability of this land resource. The SCH
44 Project alternatives could also require the utilization of Important Farmland as the site of sedimentation

basin adjacent to the New or Alamo rivers, which would be irretrievable and irreversible for the duration of the Project.

5.4 UNAVOIDABLE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Construction of the SCH Project would exceed the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District's nitrogen oxides (NO_x) (all alternatives) and particulate matter (Alternatives 1 – 3 only) thresholds. Project construction would also result in a cumulatively considerable/significant net increase in NO_x (all alternatives) and particulate matter (Alternatives 1 – 3 only) emissions. This EIS/EIR identifies feasible mitigation measures (MM AQ-1 and MM AQ-2) that would reduce emission levels, but the impact on NO_x would remain significant and unavoidable for all Project alternatives and are significant and unavoidable for fugitive dust for Alternatives 1 – 3. These construction emissions also would have a disproportionate impact on minority and low-income populations that reside in proximity to the Project site.